

LETTER TO WOMEN.

(By MARY LEE.)

"She does not ask for it." Such is the forlorn hope in which, all their pitiful so-called arguments being exhausted, the opponents of women's franchise are now fortifying themselves. Will not South Australian women join forces and storm this last miserable subterfuge? Will they not unite and insist with an emphasis which cannot be misunderstood or evaded that it is their right as citizens of a young State, which claims to be free, that its women shall be free? "Advance Australia!" says our motto. How can she advance while half her people are dragging on their limbs the shackles of a system which, though allowed to have been useful in a time of semi-savage progression, is now, in the face of modern enlightenment, everywhere denounced as the clog and curse of all attempts at true progress? Feudalism has had its day. "The old order changeth." Shall it be said that the old order has only changed hands? That the men who have done brave battle for their own rights will be content to leave women "out in the cold." Forbid it heaven that such a stigma should, for the sake of a narrow-minded selfish few, be branded on all—on the great-hearted good men who are so resolutely allying themselves with women in endeavouring to right this wrong. Truly

The bravest are the tenderest,
The loving are the daring.

"She does not ask for it." What would be said of the guardian who, having brought up his ward untutored and enslaved, in utter ignorance that he was the heir to a noble inheritance, still persisted in withholding his rights on the plea—"He does not ask for it!" If the great mass of womankind have to the present been kept in ignorance of their true errand into the world, and their due place in it as the equal-companion, friend, and helper of man, is this a reason for women continuing for ever in the same state of helplessness? If hitherto she has too often in her blindness and dependence accepted the teaching that God intended her to be to man a subservient chattel only, is she quite incapable of discerning what the spirit of the age is everywhere proclaiming in trumpet tones, that God never gave to man or woman a property in his or her fellow man or woman? In my last letter it is claimed "that that Government alone is righteous which rests on the will of the governed." No one has the hardihood to challenge this proposition. It follows that it is an arbitrary and unjust Government which compels its support from those whose will in relation to it is never consulted. That as women assist in maintaining the Government they have a right to say how and by whom they shall be governed, in other words—to the vote. No one presumes to combat these claims or controvert their justice. But while acknowledging that the claim of women to the vote is undeniably just, it is still asked timidly, "Would it be

just, it is still asked timidly, "Would it be wise to place in the hands of women the Parliamentary vote?" Such questioners affect to believe in God and yet practically ask, "Can we trust the Almighty with the after results of obeying His commands?" "Dare we take the risk of doing right?" Let us be just and fear not. Some ask "of what use would the vote be to women?" The best reply to this question I take from a recent writer in the *Westminster Review*, who says:—"Year after year in the past history of Parliament we find a gradual reform going on in the removal of injustices and remedying of grievances which pressed on different sections of the people, accompanied at the same time by an extension of the franchise, so that every citizen should at last have an opportunity of stating his grievances through his representative. During this long period the female interest has stood absolutely stationary. . . . It is to be feared that human nature is not to be trusted to deal impartially with interests running contrary to its desires, especially when the opponent is entirely unrepresented and powerless to make her voice heard. History proves the truth of this proposition. So long as workmen and tenants were unrepresented, we heard nothing of their grievances, and employers and landlords worked their own sweet will upon them without a word of remonstrance from the victims." Some are asking even now, "was it wise to grant manhood suffrage?" It might be instructive to these querists to make the experiment of withdrawing it. "All men are equal before the law," says Lord Coleridge, Lord Chancellor of England. How about the women? The Archbishop of York recently declared that "the world was finding out that women had equal rights with men." The discovery should be a ripe one; "the world" has taken a good many centuries in making it! Lord Salisbury says he hopes "the day is not far distant when women will be enfranchised." Without being much of a seer I think we may promise his Lordship that his hope is nearing its fulfilment. A few months since Lord Hartington, Mr. Chamberlain, and Sir William Harcourt were heard in a chorus of praise about the beneficial influence of women in politics, and yet we are constantly told that "women should have nothing to do with politics." What are politics? "Politics," says Lady Sandhurst, "is the science of the wellbeing of the people." What are politics? The art of educing from existing conditions the greatest amount of liberty, security, happiness, prosperity, and advancement, moral, social, and intellectual, of the community as a whole. Art or science—call it what you will—I call this politics, and I claim that women have a deeper dearer interest in politics than men have. Much has been made of the parrot cry "woman's sphere." Again and again have we asked these "echoes" to define woman's

we asked these "echoes" to define woman's sphere. We are not surprised that they have attempted no fair definition. Most thoughtful women, while holding that home is woman's sweetest, most privileged sphere, are yet happy in believing that however and wherever woman can be of best and widest usefulness to her fellow men and women, there, by God's providence, is her allotted sphere; and whatever are her best gifts of wealth or influence—of head or hand—these are the indicators, as they are the instruments, of the work which God expects of her. Mrs. Charles Birke, writing from Oxford some weeks since, says—"Woman's suffrage has more to contend with in England than in Australia, owing to the conservatism which refuses the concession, even while acknowledging its justice. The women of Australia have an easier task." Even were they (the women of South Australia) satisfied with the existing condition of things for themselves, are they not called upon to raise their voices in undivided, unflinching protest against laws and lawmakers which permit "thousands of weak, half-starved women to labour in stifling ill-ventilated rooms for sixteen hours a day or longer for one penny an hour or less?" I quote from an English paper of December, 1889. This is male representation for women! Alas! for the pinched and oppressed, the toiling, struggling, suffering, sorely tried and sorely tempted masses. Save them, help them! How? Let their poor bodies starve and rot that their souls may the sooner escape to Him who gave them. Save them! How? Go into a long neglected moral morass where every step sinks deeper and deeper beyond retreat or recovery. Why are these things so? Because the rich will be more rich, and hence the poor must become poorer. Because avarice and lust of power and worship of self have built a Babel, whose top insults high Heaven and challenges omnipotent justice. Shall we be still and share the condemnation? Shall we be still while such evils are invading with stealthy steps our own fair land? Will our closing our eyes and ears erase "the handwriting on the wall?" Could women ever have descended to such depths of misery and degradation if women had a voice in making the laws for women? Let us be up and doing. Let every woman who can influence an elector see that he seizes his vote as a sledgehammer, and goes to the poll resolved to dash from its pedestal of authority this hoary injustice to womanhood; to give no support or countenance to the man who would withhold from woman her birthright to be free. Do not let us continue to deserve the taunt, "She does not ask for it." Let us each endeavour to spare ourselves in the final retrospect, the sorrowful summing up.

The wounds I might have healed, the human sorrow
and smart,
And yet it was never in my soul to play so ill a
part:

And yet it was never in my soul to play so ill a
part;
But evil is wrought by want of thought, as well as
want of heart.
North Adelaide, April 2.